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SERMON DCXCIII.

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LYDIA'S CONVERSION AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

"And on the Sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made, and we sat down and spake to the women that resorted thither. And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple of the city of Thyatira, who worshipped God, heard us; whose heart the Lord opened that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and abide there. And she constrained us."—Acts xvi. 13, 15.

MAY it not be that many fail to be converted by reason of incorrect notions of what conversion is? May they not be unaware of the fact, that ignorance of the truth on this subject will be just as fatal to the soul as poison, taken by mistake, will be to the body? Is there not a sense of security here that ought to be alarmed? There are many that hear the Gospel, to whom as yet it is far enough from being a savor of life unto life. May not one reason be, that they do not rightly apprehend it? They have indeed certain ideas about conversion—but whether right or not, how few of them take the trouble to inquire! My impression is, that many from this cause live and die unconverted—their dim and cloudy views filling up the avenue through which truth, with its stirring realities, enters the soul.

It is, then, with unfeigned pleasure that I am able to give you an instance of real conversion, together with the circumstances

and feelings which accompanied and followed it, and all endorsed by the spirit of truth; so that every one may see what it is; what is essential to it—what its effects are, and what he himself must be and do in order to be saved.

This instance is that of Lydia; and without adverting to all its instructive points, these, which will be illustrated in their order, will be sufficient for my purpose: *THE IMPEDIMENT in the way of her conversion*; *THE AGENT by whom it was removed*; *THE CIRCUMSTANCES attending its removal*, AND *THE CONSEQUENCES which followed it*.

I. What the impediment in the way of her conversion was, is seen in the statement, "Whose heart the Lord *opened*." Till then it was *shut*—it did not admit the truth, which pressed from without. There was self-satisfaction. Her heart had guests which suited its taste; and fearful of reprisals—apprehensive that thoughts might come in to disturb what was going on, it had shut and barred the door to keep them out. This was the impediment. There are many things which contribute to shut the heart against the Gospel, and to keep it closed; such as deeply rooted prejudices—erroneous views of the truth, and especially habits of vice and licentiousness; but then these things would not very seriously endanger one's salvation if they did not close up his heart to the impressions of guilt and the powers of the world to come. If Belshazzar, and Haman, and Judas, and Simon Magus, had suffered the sober voice of reason and conscience to enter their hearts in the hour of temptation that ruined them, would they not have been saved from the terrible shipwreck of character and hope which they experienced? You have seen men who seemed to have but little sensibility in view of our suffering humanity, and less disposition to go out of their way to relieve it. That which operates like a charm on certain minds—the work, for instance, of aiding the fugitive from oppression, or that of giving light to the dark places of earth, is all a blank to them. The manifest reason is, that they have shut their hearts to every impression that calls for self-denial and self-sacrifice. It seems to us, also, that men engaged in the liquor traffic, do not give a fair equivalent for what they receive—for bread they give a stone; for a fish a serpent; for the money received, they give poverty and a ruined character, and broken hopes, and wretched families, and premature deaths. We think that even they must see that such are the regular fruits of their business. Why are they so blind? The answer is, their hearts have they *closed* to the truth.

You have all seen the stubborn child, pouting his lips, and darting fire from his eyes, simply because his parents bade him do a very reasonable thing, but a thing that he disliked to do. Have you a doubt what made him look so ugly—what made him mutter such bitter words? Why no; his heart was in fault—it was *shut*.

This, then, is the grand impediment which hinders the conversion of sinners. And hence they are described in the Bible as "having eyes, but seeing not; as having ears, but hearing not; as having hearts, but understanding not." And then the reason given is all the more impressive because it is so obviously true: "*their eyes have they closed*," and let their hearts wax gross, lest they should see with "their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and be converted." Yes, here is the impediment, and what is worse, it is placed by sinners themselves across the path to life, and obstinately kept there. They are helped, however, in this suicidal policy by an agency which ought to startle, as if a serpent stung them. Listen—for I quote from the word of Him who cannot lie—"For if our Gospel is hid, it is hid to them that are lost; in whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, *lest* the light of the glorious Gospel of the Son of God should shine into them." To keep out this light they shut up their hearts. Hence Christ is said to stand at the door of the heart and to knock, while but few, very few, open the door, and thus let salvation in. This was Lydia's difficulty, till she went to the prayer meeting by the river's side. She went there, as many now go to the house of God, with a heart closed to the truth, as it is in Jesus; but *there*, unexpectedly to herself, it was opened, and emotions of new and unutterable interest filled her soul, and immediately she passed from death unto life.

II. And here we naturally ask, *By whom was this impediment removed?*

"Whose heart the LORD opened." It was not effected by any charm in that prayer meeting—nor by the power of human persuasion, nor by the unusual thoughtfulness and effort of Lydia herself. It was the work of God. Not that means are useless, nor that Lydia had no control over her own heart—but simply that as she had shut it against the claims of God, and would never of her own accord remove the barricade, so the opening depended on the mercy of God. And what was true in her case is a truth so universal, that the Bible casts us all on the same resource for help against the ruin which our own obstinacy will otherwise bring upon us, declaring, that "it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy—that neither is he that planteth anything, nor he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase."

And here, if we bear in mind what is meant by opening the heart, and why it must be opened, if opened at all, by God himself, we shall feel none of the difficulties which will otherwise perplex the subject. You never suppose that because a child shuts his heart against cheerfully doing the reasonable things required by his parents, that therefore he cannot do them, but only that he is self-willed and obstinate, and *will* not, nor that the father is

to be blamed for undertaking in any proper way to open the heart of his child to just impressions of his duty. But this is just the case of all the stout-hearted towards God. It is not inability, but willfulness—it is not ignorance, but selfishness, that leads them to shut their hearts against the voice of God. Let this be remembered, and who will think hard of any one but themselves, if

“The transformation of apostate man
From fool to wise, from earthly to divine,
Is work for Him that made him.”

III. But another important fact appears in this history of Lydia's conversion, relating TO THE CIRCUMSTANCES in which this opening of closed hearts is effected.

When this is declared to be the work of God, it is regarded by some as justifying the inference that human effort in the case is useless; and that the opening, as it depends on God, can be made in one place as well as another. But this is the language of a thoughtless, if not a bitter caviller. So the truly thoughtful never reason. It is forbidden by the clear light shed over the whole subject from the circumstances attending Lydia's conversion. — *WHERE was it that her heart was opened?*—and, *by what MEANS?* It was at a PRAYER MEETING, and by MEANS of the truth that Paul preached there. In all this can you discover any violation of the laws of free agency, or any thing justifying the inference in regard to the uselessness of means?

Let us recur to our former illustration—the case of a *froward* child. Why is he so disobedient? It is because he loves his own selfish pleasure more than the duty he owes to his parents. This is precisely the state of feeling which every sinner cherishes towards God. He loves the gratifications of self-indulgence, and intensely dislikes the healthy self-denials of Christian duty. He is unwilling, therefore, to conform his will to the infinitely better will of God. Now in the case of the child, it is obvious to all that if the father undertakes to open his heart and subdue his stubbornness, he must do it by the use of *appropriate means*; and yet, that whatever the means, whether the application of the rod, or the voice of persuasion, or the cutting language of reproof, the child was active and voluntary through the whole process, though the father opened his heart. In the day of the father's power, if I may so use the language of Scripture, the child was made willing to do his duty. Now it is precisely thus that God deals with the rebellious and froward in opening their hearts—by the judgments of his rod, or by the melting voice that comes from Calvary. And all the while they bear about the consciousness that they can open or shut their hearts to truthful impressions, *just as they please*; that they can read the Bible—go to the place of prayer and be thoughtful, or they put the

Bible aside, and go to places of mirth, and be thoughtless, *just as they please*. And when, go where they will, they do not succeed in drowning the still small voice, and hushing the terrible voice of guilt; and when this pressure on the conscience becomes at length so great as to bring them openly to ask, What shall we do? there is still the clear consciousness of acting freely. And when they bow to the supremacy of God, and their hearts are opened to receive the pardon and justification of free grace, they never complain of any forceful influence, nor do they say, Our own arm hath gotten the victory—but, “Not unto us—not unto us, but to thy name give glory for thy mercy and thy truth’s sake.” Thus all along was there an awakened, active mind, conscious freedom, while the Spirit of God begat them unto a lively hope *with the word of truth*.

Still God is not confined to one method of operation. In Lydia’s case, the means seemed like the gentle rain—in Paul’s, there was the sterner voice of the storm; in the Jailor’s at Philippi, the earthquake that shook the prison, combined its voice with the truth that shook his soul. In every conversion recorded in the Bible, *there was an apprehension of danger—great seriousness, and earnest inquiry after the way to be saved*, while the cavalier as such, and the disputer of this world, and the thoughtless infidel continued as before dead in trespasses and sins, thus proving that though God begets us of *his own will*, it is always *with the word of truth*; and that, too, in such a way as to demand the active co-operation of those who do not receive the grace of God in vain.

It was thus with Lydia. She went to the prayer meeting and heard Paul preach; and there the Lord opened her heart with the truth which had been commended to her judgment and conscience. Oh, if she had been a trifler there; or if she had been engrossed with a fascinating novel, or if she had stayed away, do you not fully believe that her history would have been as dark with selfishness as now it is radiant with the light of truth and love?

IV. And now we come to the CONSEQUENCES of this opening of her heart.

The first noticeable effect was, *an earnest attention to the word*.

“Whose heart the Lord opened, that she *attended* to the things that were spoken of Paul.” If listless before, she was attentive now. She heard as for her life. The word met a felt want of her soul. The same effect is seen wherever divine influence is felt. The Gospel all at once is heard, as it was never heard before. It is heard as a message of life or death to the soul. It is impossible to be indifferent when the hope of heaven first dawns on the soul. When the Lord opens the heart, evil passions are driven out, and a satisfying good enters. A new world opens—

new thoughts are awakened—new joys speak. No wonder the eye is *attentive* to the publisher of such good tidings; no wonder the ear is greedy of the ravishing sound of praise and salvation.

This breathless attention to the word we have all witnessed; and it was marvellous in our eyes. O come the Sabbath day, and the solemn assembly, where the like attentiveness shall attest the presence and power of the Holy Spirit!

The next effect of Lydia's conversion was her public profession of religion, and the baptism of herself and her household.

She entered in due time into covenant with God and his people, and had the seal of the covenant applied to her children.

Such an effect should follow in every case of conversion. The heart, which the Lord has opened, will pine if kept too long away from the ordinances of his house. It will begin to close, and continue to close its door to the truth, if there be a thoughtless refusal to appoint a suitable day for the public espousals to Christ. The sacramental bread and wine are needed for its nourishment in the divine life. "My flesh," said Christ, "is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed." Yes, every converted soul needs to take into his own hands the memorials of that broken body and shed blood—needs the restraints as well as the stirring influence of a public profession of religion! Else, being disobedient, the light of hope will soon become dim—the prospect will be cloudy, and lacking the usual enjoyment—the soul will begin to backslide—the cravings of a still very imperfectly sanctified heart after worldly good will again be felt, and thus years of decline and comparative uselessness will come and go, and perhaps death ensue, and there be no illumination of hope around the death shade. How much better for every convert to do as Lydia did, and join the church of Christ, resolved henceforth to be a shining light!

And may I not appeal to some of my readers who have for years indulged the hope of pardon without confessing Christ before men, for proof that you are losers by it on the score of growth and activity in the divine life? Do you not find the light for which you were waiting, moving farther off, and the evidence of your piety becoming more indistinct, and the joys of your first love seeming like a dream, and temptations to go astray multiplying and gaining strength? Indeed, how can it be otherwise? Not to do the things that Christ commands is to play into the hands of the evil one—it is to fill the mind with doubt and the heart with unbelief, and to paralyze the energies of the soul in the way of well doing. Does not all this prove that the Lord has a controversy with you? O think of it, lest a deeper darkness gather around you, and the sorrows of a hopeless death-bed be yours. Think of Lydia, and imitate her promptness in obeying the calls of duty.

And here let us thank God that the children of believers are

not forgotten in the provisions of his mercy, and that they are permitted to be associated with their parents in the privileges of the everlasting covenant first made with the father of the faithful. Believers in Christ are described as the children of Abraham, and of course have an interest in the covenant which spread the wing of its grace over his household. This privilege Lydia and those who acted with her seemed to appreciate. Not a word is said about her children's conversion; and yet no sooner was she converted and baptized, than her household were baptized also. It seemed to be regarded as a matter of course—an effect sure to follow the cause supposed. And indeed who would wish to have it otherwise, and thus to divide households and separate parents and children—an idea abhorrent to the Jewish mind, and, as it seems to us, to the mind of God. Is this promise nothing—"I will be a God to thee and to thy seed after thee?" So Lydia did not feel; and so may we never feel.

Another consequence of the opening of Lydia's heart to Christianity, *was the manifestation of a benevolent, self-sacrificing spirit.*

"If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord," she said to Paul and his associate, "come into my house and abide there." And the historian adds, "She constrained us." Yes, faithfulness to the Lord always brings with it largeness of heart. She so prized the gospel as the regeneration of society, as well as of individual hearts, that she cheerfully gave bed and board to its preachers at Philippi. She would not be denied the privilege—"She *constrained* us." The religion that does not make men benevolent and self-sacrificing for the general good, is not the religion of Lydia—it is not the religion of Christ. It is only profession without principle—it is a name—not a power. And herein is a test, by which we may know whether we are in the faith.

And here I should close, were it not that two inferences are presented so clear, and at the same time so important that I cannot forbear the statement and a brief illustration of them.

1. The one is, *that God moves first in regeneration.*

Nothing is said as to the nature and source of the impulse that led Lydia to that prayer meeting by the river's side; it may have been the force of early education—it may have been mere curiosity—and it may have been the persuasive, though unconscious influence of the Holy Spirit. But when there, she made no advance in a Christian education till the *Lord* opened her heart. He moved first in the change, which ever afterwards was her chief joy, and is now the crown of her rejoicing in heaven.

So now God moves first in the regenerating process. No heart is of its own accord opened to Christ, though he stands at the door and knocks till his hair is wet with the dews of night. And it was not till after a thorough and conclusive trial had been

made that he publicly declared the fact, and the reason. "Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life." "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do." And then he endorses the truth which came out so clearly in Lydia's conversion—that God moves first—by the words, "No man can come unto me except the Father which sent me draw him."

Let any impartial man who doubts this try his own heart, and see if it will yield to the strongest religious motives that he can bring to bear upon it. Let him say to his soul, in view of the judgment and its final issues, "Yield now to the just supremacy of thy Maker, and to the grace that is in Christ Jesus, forsaking every sin. Thy race will shortly be run, and every hour thou art in danger till thy peace is made with God." Now what is the effect of an appeal so truthful, so impressive as this? Does his heart cheerfully yield the throne to God, and crucify its lusts? O no. It still lies heavy there, just like a rock of ice—its idols are all retained, even while it quakes with its fearful looking-for of judgment and the fiery indignation which is to follow. No. He will not come unto Christ that he might have life.

So the Bible exhibits the fact in the parable of the Supper, from which the invited guests all with one consent begged to be excused, and that, too, for reasons the most frivolous, though the real reason was not given—that *they did not wish to come*.

Hence it is evident that God, and not man, moves first in the work of regeneration, and the *necessity* for it is the sinner's own fault, since it is only his own stubbornness and intense aversion to truth and purity that makes the help of the Holy Spirit so indispensable.

2. The other inference to which I alluded, as clearly springing from the history of Lydia, is, *that it is not a matter of indifference, as is sometimes alleged, whether we attend religious meetings or not.*

What if Lydia, on the morning of that day in which the Lord opened her heart to the impressions of the Gospel, had reasoned, as many since have falsely reasoned, on this wise—"If I am elected to be saved, the event is certain, do what I will; if not, I shall be lost, do what I can to prevent, and therefore I will not attend the prayer meeting this morning by the river side. I will rather seek for gratification in such scenes of amusement as this city affords;" is it not morally certain that the effect would have been widely different from what it was? Bearing in mind this general principle laid down by James, "Of his own will begat he us *with the word of truth*," we cannot but think that her conversion turned on her hearing the Gospel; and hence that it was not a matter of indifference whether she attended religious meetings or not, or whether she trifled or not while there. To shun the place of prayer—to avoid that hearing of Christianity, by

which the apostle says, "faith cometh;" to keep the mind filled and occupied with worldly cares and pleasures; to form the habit of cavilling on the subject of religious doctrines and duties; to let the imagination revel in scenes of impurity, seems to us by every deduction of sober reason, and by the uniform testimony of the Bible, to be a policy whose only tendency is to ruin the soul. The education thus obtained will certainly unfit us for the employments of heaven.

True, many attend church and hear the voice of prayer and the offers of Christianity, whose hearts the Lord does not open—whose minds fail to receive the impress of the Gospel. But is there not a cause—a cause, too, in themselves? May it not be, because they permit the god of this world to blind their minds, so that the light of the Gospel is hid? Yet it is also true that only those are converted who are led in some way to know themselves—their guilt and self-ruin—and the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. The Spirit of God goes with his word. To put asunder what He has joined together is the mark of desperate depravity. He has joined his Spirit in the work of regeneration to one whose outward ear is open to the truth: In his purpose he joins the means and the end—the cause and the effect. He decreed that Hezekiah's life should be prolonged fifteen years; but if Hezekiah had trusted merely to the decree, and refused to take any food, it is certain that he would not have lived a month; nor would the divine purpose have been frustrated, for that embraced the *means* as well as the *end*.

So any one of you, my hearers, can join yourselves *to*, or separate yourselves *from* the word of God. You can, if you choose, be thoughtful—you can incline your ear to the Gospel. You can compare yourselves with the divine law—you can let your thoughts run in this direction till your heart shall be greatly disquieted on its bed of self-indulgence, and till you shall cry out, "God be merciful to me a sinner." This is the course of sober common sense. It is the course which God prescribes. But there is another and a widely different course which you can take, and be equally voluntary. You can be thoughtless. You can drown the voice of conscience—you can avoid the place of prayer. You can fill your mind with the slang of scepticism; you can refuse to read the Bible and to pray. You can be the companion of fools. You can quench the Spirit—you can put asunder what God has joined together. Then, as surely as Hezekiah would have died if he had taken no food, so surely will you perish utterly in your corruptions.

I, therefore, call heaven and earth to record, that I have this day set before you life and death; a blessing and a curse—a blessing that your soul pines to enjoy, a curse that never causeless comes!

SERMON DCXCIV.

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NO COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE DEAD TO THE LIVING.

"It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. I knew a man in Christ about fourteen years ago (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth); such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth); how that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter."—2 Cor. xii. 1-4.

I HAVE not read this paragraph of Scripture for the purpose of descanting upon the remarkable scene which it presents before us. We may not pry, with a vain curiosity, into things which the apostle declares it was not lawful for him to utter. But why it was unlawful for him to communicate his "visions and revelations," may be both a proper and a profitable inquiry. We may find in the sequel, that much practical truth stands connected with the solution of the inquiry.

We have an account of others, besides Paul, returning from the world of spirits. Lazarus was recalled from the dead. Many bodies of the saints which slept, arose and came out of their graves, after the resurrection of Christ, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many. Dorcas was restored from the eternal world to earth. But there is no intimation that any of them made the slightest communication of what they had seen or heard in the world of spirits. Why this common and unbroken silence? Men are, if possible, more eager to tell than to hear some new thing. The saints who arose after the resurrection of Christ had doubtless been deceased for some time, though probably not long, as they seem to have been recognized by those to whom they appeared. They had opportunity to communicate intelligence; for they appeared unto many. Why did they not avail themselves of it? Some have supposed that Lazarus and Dorcas, particularly, had nothing to communicate—that their spirits were not, during their brief separation from the body, in a sentient state, or, at least, that there is no reason to think that they had visions and revelations of heaven. This supposition is perfectly gratuitous, and in the case of the saints who arose after the resurrection of Christ, seems very improbable; for they must have been deceased for a considerable time, and it comports with all our ideas of a future state, that the believer, "absent from the

body, is present with the Lord." "To-day," said Christ to the penitent thief, "shalt thou be with me in paradise." Others have suggested, that whatever knowledge they obtained of the eternal world, vanished from recollection upon return to the body. This supposition is not less gratuitous than the former.

But, admitting that all these persons told nothing because they had nothing to tell, the inquiry comes back, why Paul, whose spirit was in a sentient state, and who might have communicated "visions and revelations of the Lord," if it had been lawful, was not permitted to utter any thing which he saw and heard in paradise. The same reasons which made it unlawful for Paul to reveal what he had learned of the eternal world, will explain the silence of the others to whom allusion has been made. Why, then, was it not lawful for Paul to utter the things which he saw and heard in paradise? I propose to state several probable reasons.

I. It is the express will of God, that we should derive our knowledge of the eternal world from the Bible.

He has given us His word to be our guide to eternal life. It is a safe guide. It is a sufficient guide. All that we need to know—all it seems best to our Heavenly Father that we should at present know of a future state—is here revealed. More we might not be able to bear. More might gratify an idle curiosity at the expense of turning our minds away from those practical truths in which we have so deep a present personal interest. We may press a thousand queries.

It may seem desirable to have information upon many subjects on which the Bible maintains a profound silence. We would know where heaven is—the number of its inhabitants—the nature of their employments and the mode of their intercourse, far more definitely than we at present do; by what means the soul, when it leaves the body, will reach the place of its abode; whether heaven will at once burst upon the departing saint—whether he will recognize those whom he has known on earth—whether those who have been mutually dear on earth will rejoice in each other as such in heaven. We would know why sin entered the world, and what is to be the extent of its dark domain. We would know the nature of Christ's glorified body, and thus with what body His followers shall rise. These and many like questions curiosity puts and puts in vain.

How far Paul was qualified by his visions and revelations to answer them, we know not; but, doubtless, many things of a deeply interesting nature he might, if it had been lawful, have communicated. That he and others have not been permitted to bring information from the world of spirits, is proof that the Bible reveals all pertaining to that world which it is best for us at present to know.

Our Saviour, in his reply to the question, "Are there few that be saved?" intimates that all questions of mere curiosity respecting a future state—turning away our thoughts from our own present duties, on which our own future and eternal well-being depends, are impertinent. While the written revelation was yet imperfect, God communicated his will through visions and revelations. Thus he communicated with the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, with Samuel and the prophets, and with the apostles, and other early Christians; but since the canon has been closed with the seer of the visions of Patmos, and guarded against the least alteration by a woe upon him who should add to or take from its contents, all *such* communications from heaven have ceased. I say *such* communications. We may have intercourse with heaven when we will. "Truly our fellowship is, *is*, not shall be, with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ." Aid to understand the present revelation, we may expect, but new revelations we are not to expect. Even the Holy Spirit, whose office is to communicate truth, is restricted to taking of the things of Christ. "He shall take of mine, and shall show it unto you." There is a lesson in the silence which has reigned for more than eighteen hundred years. Its testimony is, that the Bible reveals all that we need to know—all that it is best we should at present know, pertaining to the spiritual world.

II. *Were such communications to be made, they would divert our minds from the Bible, our guide to eternal life.*

Had Paul been permitted to utter his visions and revelations, the men of his time would have been looking for other similar communications, and their attention have been turned quite away from that counsel of Christ—"Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and *they are they which testify of me.*" Men are ever prone to look for other opportunities, and other means of religious impression, than those which they at present enjoy. It was so in Christ's day. The Jews were constantly seeking "a sign from heaven." "Except ye see signs and wonders," said Christ, "ye will not believe." He was working before them the works of God,—by his word making the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the lame to walk, and even the dead to live; and yet, they were clamoring for a sign from heaven, some miraculous appearance in the air, more startling than any thing which was transpiring on the earth. But this desire he would not gratify. "An evil and adulterous generation," says he, "seeketh after a sign and there shall no sign be given it but the sign of the prophet Jonas; for as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

He here directs them to his Resurrection as the miracle, which, above every other, should prove his divine legation.

In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus he recognizes, and by the mouth of his servant Abraham, rebukes this infidel spirit. "I pray thee, therefore, father, that thou wouldst send him to my father's house, for I have five brethren, that he may testify unto them; lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, they have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them. And he said unto him, Nay, father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead they will repent; and he said unto him, if they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead." Men, at this day, are prone to quiet themselves in their present unbelief by the fancy that some sudden startling influence will hereafter rouse their sensibilities, and sway their conduct; and, it is noticeable, how God in his providence disappoints the expectation. Never were there fewer conversions to Christ than during the progress of the Asiatic cholera in its first circuit of death. At no period of life does repentance, so far as we can judge, so unfrequently occur, as in the awful hour of death. It is often an hour of the wildest delirium; more often a season of profound lethargy, so deep as to be scarcely distinguished from the "sleep that hath no waking." God so orders things in his providence as to disappoint expectation from future opportunities, and future means of religious impression, as if on purpose to throw us back upon the Bible, and upon the improvement of this His chosen means of salvation.

III. Had Paul been permitted to utter his visions and revelations, *it might have encouraged others to expect such communications, and dreams and phantasms of the imagination been taken for heavenly visions.*

We know what power the imagination has—what reality it gives to things unreal—to "airy nothings." And sad would it be, if by any means we should be suffered to take its hallucinations for "visions and revelations of the Lord." Numerous facts might be stated to show the power of an excited imagination to fill the mind with strange, and apparently supernatural visions. Most of the facts, however, are too wild and ludicrous in their incoherence to be with propriety introduced in this place; many occurring in the times upon which we have fallen are too *silly* to be entertained in any place.

Survivors often think that they hear music in the air just after the death of their friends, particularly those who in their lifetime were eminently holy. Now this may be easily explained from the power of imagination. There is usually much singing by the bed-side of dying christians. The mind retains a very vivid conception of the music, and easily mistakes the vivid con-

ception of music for music actually filling the air. A person expecting to be called at a particular moment, for example, to take his place by the couch of a sick friend, will hear his own name with the most perfect distinctness. He mistakes the vivid conception of the sound for the sound itself. So one standing on the shore, anxiously looking for the arrival of his vessel, will be confident that he sees the vessel. He sees it with his "mind's eye." We may at once account for those sights and sounds which persons just translated from the darkness of nature into the marvellous light of the Gospel, are wont to see and hear. The imagination is intensely excited, the mind is filled with images of heavenly things, and these vivid images are mistaken for actual perceptions.

"We listen to our fond hopes
Even till they seem no more our fancy's children;
We put on them a prophet's robe, endow them
With prophets' voices, and then Heaven speaks in them,
And that which we would have be, surely shall be."

I am the more confirmed in the truth of this explanation, in view of the fact that these sights and sounds are perceived only when the imagination is greatly excited. If they are real, it is difficult to see why they should not be repeated when the mind is in a calm, unruffled state—the state most favorable for enjoying communion with Heaven. But I apprehend it will be found upon careful inquiry, that these preternatural sights and sounds are perceived only when the nervous system is deranged, or the mind is in a highly excited state.

It will perhaps be suggested, that the visions of the imagination, wanting the authority of miraculous attestation, might be perfectly harmless, for unauthenticated by miracles they can never obtain credence, much less such credence as to supplant the "faithful word." Such a suggestion, were it to be made, would betray much ignorance of facts. Mankind have, from the beginning, been ready to believe anything and everything, rather than inspired, miraculously authenticated truth. How often did God rebuke his chosen people for turning away from his servants to listen to false prophets, who "spake a vision of their own hearts, and not from the mouth of the Lord." Said Christ to the Jews, "I am come in my Father's name and ye receive me not, if another shall come in his own name him ye will receive." How many remain in willing ignorance of God's blessed word, whilst they repose a single-hearted faith in all the legends and mummeries of Popery.

What multitudes have turned away from the simple but sublime descriptions of heaven by the Apostle John, to believe the inflated and foolish revelations of the Koran. Among its fooleries let me just notice Mahomet's account of his journey to heaven. He solemnly affirmed that "he had been to the heaven of heavens—had successively ascended to seven heavens, with

his companion Gabriel, receiving and returning the salutations of its blessed inhabitants—had then proceeded alone within two bow-shots of the throne of the Almighty, when he felt the cold which pierced him to the heart, and was touched on the shoulder by the hand of God, who commanded him to pray fifty times a day, but with the advice of Moses he was prevailed on to have the number reduced to five, and that he then returned to Jerusalem and to Mecca, having performed the journey of thousands of years in the tenth part of a night." Puerile as all this is, I question whether it is a whit more so than the visions of Emanuel Swedenborg, that prince of dreamers; or the revelations of Smith, the prophet of Mormonism; or last, not least, the responses of spiritual rappings. And yet, Swedenborgians, and Mormons, and Spiritualists are to be found among the sons of New England, distinguished above every other people for coolness of judgment and caution against every species of imposition; so credulous is the human mind in its best estate of error, so averse to truth, even "the truth as it is in Jesus."

The silence which broods over the grave, is a mute, indeed, but stern rebuke of all pretences to correspondence with departed spirits. Of the myriads who have passed through the veil into eternity, not one has been permitted to return a word of information. A few have come back to earth, and mingled awhile in its every day scenes; but in respect to the things which they saw in the world of spirits, their lips have been closed in speechless silence. "Death, the mysterious passage to the spirit land, is as new and untried as when Abel first explored the fearful labyrinth." We think of our departed friends till our hearts are ready to burst. How it would relieve the agony of separation, if they could once more break the silence of death! Why are they not permitted to tell us at least that they are now happy in the presence of that Saviour whose name they here bore, and in whose grace they trusted through the days of earth's pilgrimage? Perhaps for the same reason that made it unlawful for Paul to utter the things which he saw and heard in paradise. Were they suffered to revisit us, though unseen, and to make their presence manifest by the whispers of love, we might expect the recurrence of such scenes, and the visions of an excited imagination to be mistaken for the visits of departed spirits, and the wildest phantasms of our own minds to be taken for revelations from the unseen world. We shall go to them, but they shall not return to us.

IV. *We have no reason to believe, that messengers from the dead could give testimony more impressive than that we now have.*

Without miracles, they could give no testimony on which any reliance could be placed. Suppose Paul had communicated the things which he saw and heard in paradise, unaccompanied by

miracles, the narrative would have been entitled to no credence. The things which he took for heavenly visions might have been visions of his own imagination, and on no account, whatever, to be received as revelations from heaven, no more than the trance of Tennent, or the wonderful dream of Doddridge. Tennent and Doddridge, and others, may, for aught we can say, have had communications made to them from heaven. Tennent went to the grave under the solemn impression, that while he lay in this trance, he saw things unseen by mortal eyes; but the only way in which the fact can be established to the satisfaction of others, is by the power of miracles. But with miracles, we have no reason to believe that messengers from the dead could give more impressive testimony than we now have. The reply of Abraham to the rich man, by fair implication, teaches this. "They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them. Nay, father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto them, if they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead." A messenger from the dead, to be intelligible, must describe the unseen world by images drawn from material objects; but inspiration has already selected the most vivid images, both of beauty and splendor, and employed them to represent heaven, and the most terrific objects in nature to shadow forth the world of woe. The only way in which he could deepen the impression already made, would be by multiplying images, and by greater minuteness of detail; but who does not know that "familiarity begets insensibility." Suppose a messenger from the invisible world were now to enter that door, bearing upon his scarred and scathed visage "the marks and numbers" of a lost spirit, we should be startled, petrified, become as dead men, perhaps die; but admit that we were only stunned, as soon as we recovered from the shock, we should be the same men as before. There is nothing in mere affright to soften and subdue the heart into penitence. Men are *drawn*, not *driven*, into the kingdom of heaven.

But then, we must be convinced of a future state of misery, and are we not convinced now? Have we any doubt of the existence of such a being as Jesus Christ, a messenger first from heaven, and next from the dead, and that He taught the doctrine of the final misery of the wicked? But the impression made by one appearing directly before us, would be more vivid, no doubt it would, but what then? Men in the hour of death have sometimes far more vivid impressions of a future state of misery, and of their instant exposure to it, than are ever known in the hey-day of health. They are told by those in whose word they confide, that they can live, at most, but a few hours. In the perfect possession of reason, they feel that except they repent they shall thus soon be *lost, lost forever*, and yet they in such respect certainly give no evidence of the fact. All this merely

reveals the power of the heart over the understanding—merely shows that men can act, and do act, in direct opposition to their strongest convictions of duty and safety. Probably there are no circumstances in which repentance less often occurs, than amidst the phrenzied alarm which sometimes exists in a dying hour—an alarm not remotely resembling the effect which would be produced by the appearance of a messenger from the dead.

The Jews were seized with consternation at the crucifixion of Christ; but as soon as they recovered from the panic, they were the same men as before. It was not till fifty days after when the wild and frantic excitement which destroyed the power of collected and consecutive thought had subsided, that they were in any considerable numbers converted.

The more we look at the subject, the more, I think, will be our common conviction, that a messenger from the dead could make no more impressive disclosures of the world of woe, than God has made in his word. He might tell us that men are not merely exposed to perdition, but some are actually there. The Bible tells us that Judas fell by transgression "that he might go to his own place." What man in his senses believes that that place is heaven! that as he pressed the veil with the blood of the innocent on his heart, a voice from the excellent glory broke upon his ear, "come up hither," and that he went up to take one of the thrones, vacated by the apostasy of the devil and his angels? Believe it who can! We think that with such testimony we should be convinced. We are convinced. Men may pretend that they are not, but God has taken care of that matter. The manifestation of the truth commends itself to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

But men do not act as if they were convinced. They do not, and yet they do. The Jews were convinced by the miracles of Christ. "What do we for this man doeth many miracles?" What next? "Then from that day forth they took counsel together to put him to death." Men oppose the truth for the very reason that they are convinced, and the more madly the stronger their conviction. Impenitent men will sometimes allege in proof that professors of religion are hypocrites. If we believed as you pretend to in the doctrine of endless misery, we could not hold our peace, we would stop every man that we met, and warn him of his danger. Others will make their own defence, but for myself, whether honest or not, in my Christian profession, one thing I know, so far as I can know any thing, by my own consciousness, that God has given me such conviction of sin as leaves no lurking doubt in my mind as to the truth of the doctrine of the final misery of the wicked. I have no more doubt of this truth, than that there is a God who reigns in righteousness, and if it promised any good, I would stop my fellow sinners at every corner and intercept your way with the angel cry, "woe, woe,

woe," but if on this day, in this place, appealing to the law and the testimony, I cannot convince you of your exposure to endless misery, or at least so convince you as to produce the least practical effect, of what use this abrupt address which at my lips would carry no conviction, and which must provoke either mirth or wrath.

— God has made it our duty to "preach the word," to reason out of "the Scriptures;" and if men will not be convinced from this source, He will probably leave them to learn from their own experience what they will not take upon His word; and this leads me to say in the close, that if you continue to neglect present opportunities and misimprove present privileges, your expectations from the future will in all probability disappoint you. God has "magnified his word above all his name." He is jealous for the honor of "the word." He will do nothing in His providence to disparage the preaching of "the word." "By the foolishness of preaching He saveth them that believe." You may look forward to some sudden, startling, overwhelming influence in the hour of death, but you will probably be disappointed. You will then be deprived of reason, or be so paralyzed by disease, as to look the grim messenger in the face, with the vacant stare of fatuity; or should you have "visions and revelations," not of "the third heaven," but of the lowest hell, "unspeakable," which you neither may nor can utter, in the horror of your doom you will "give up the ghost." May God incline you to improve the passing hour as for your life!

SERMON DCXCV.

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A FAITHFUL SAYING.

"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief."—1 Tim. i. 15.

There have been many sayings current in the world, some of which were true and others false; some embodied important principles, others were only specious; some had been transmitted from generation to generation, from age to age, others have been forgotten; some have been practical, evincing great wisdom and knowledge of men and things, others have been unsound, have contained much error and false philosophy.

The apostle speaks of a saying which he affirms to be true and worthy of all attention—it refers to Jesus Christ and the object of his mission. The world had been advised of his coming—many reports were circulated about him as he came to be known. Some originated in jealousy, others in prejudice; some assailed his character, others referred to his designs. It was said that he was low bred because he turned his attention to the poor; many reported that he was a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber because he was occasionally in the society of publicans and sinners. Some charged him with ambition, that he aspired to a crown, others accused him of hypocrisy, that under the garb of innocence he aimed to subvert the Jewish polity and set up a new order of things; that his object was to destroy the law and the prophets. Time—which is a diligent inquirer and a just judge—has exposed all that was false, and confirmed all that was true. His true character, personal and moral, has been “placed under the seal and safeguard of death and immortality.”

We propose to examine this saying which the apostle has transmitted to us, *what it implies, its claims to truth and general belief.*

I. We inquire *what is implied in this saying?*

1. It is implied that men are lost. If it would be absurd to offer life to those who were not dead, it must be equally so to speak of saving those who were not perishing. If man were only in a partially lapsed condition, if his disease were not universal, a less effectual remedy might have answered. The salvation mentioned in the text, as we may gather from other parts of Scripture, is a full and entire deliverance from sin, its guilt, pollution, and power; including exemption from the condemnation of the law, freedom from the whole system of corrupt inclinations—sometimes called *justification of life*; sometimes *the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost*; sometimes the putting off the old man with his deeds, and the putting on of the new man. The obvious import of such strong language is, that man, in his native character, is a lost sinner. The apostle drew the same inference because we thus judge, *if one died for all, then were all dead*; if Christ Jesus came to save sinners, then they needed a Saviour; he would not have come on a useless errand; they stood in infinite need.

2. It is also implied that *their salvation is a work of great difficulty.* The names Christ Jesus, signify the anointed one—one set apart for a particular work. If the work of salvation could have been achieved by any other being in the universe, God had not sent his only Son. The law was broken, its awful penalty was incurred; the justice of God was armed for the destruction of the sinner; who could interpose, arrest the course of justice, set aside the penalty and open a way in which the law could be sustained, divine justice satisfied, the government of Jehovah vindicated, and the sinner saved? To preserve these high interests, and bring in everlasting righteousness was a mighty work. An angel could not accomplish it. When there was no eye to pity, no arm to save, then God brought salvation by laying help on one that is mighty. Infinite wisdom was employed in devising, and infinite power was exerted in executing the plan of salvation. Hence Christ Jesus is called *the wisdom of God and the power of God*. He assumed human nature into personal union with the divine, that as Mediator he might effect a reconciliation. To accom-

plish so difficult a work, he must understand, and take an equal interest in, the character and concerns of both parties. From the relation which he sustained, the place he held, he only could make an end of sin by giving himself a sin offering, he only could magnify the law and make it honorable by his active and passive obedience. When Jesus, therefore, left his Father's bosom, it was on no excursion of pleasure; it was not to wander forth among the worlds that rolled in infinite space to receive their homage; but he came into this revolted province—this world of sin and error and rebellion, to save the orphans that were lying in their blood; to restore the outcasts that were ready to perish; this divine and heavenly work was to be effected, not by the mere energy of his will, not by commissioning an angel or a being of inferior order; but by giving himself in sacrifice—by a life of obedience—by a vicarious death—by bearing our sins in his own body on the tree.

3. It is more than implied, it is affirmed, by the apostle, *that the chief of sinners may be saved*. He does not hesitate to refer to himself, who was before a blasphemer and a persecutor, and injurious, and yet *the grace of God was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus*. Such an instance of grace was designed to illustrate the fullness of divine mercy. "Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." A pattern is a specimen; in the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, the world might see what abundant mercy there is treasured up in Christ. Many an awakened sinner, who might otherwise have given up in despair, has been encouraged by his case to apply to the blood of sprinkling. If one so full of pride and self-righteousness; if such an opposer, breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, obtain mercy, the vilest of the vile may be saved.

4. We are also taught by this saying *the infinite grace and love of God*. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners who deserved to die. Had he been sent to punish them, had he been charged with a commission to execute the sentence of the law, it would have comported with our ideas of justice; but "*God, who is rich in mercy for the great love wherewith he loved us, sent his Son, not to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved.*" Verily God's thoughts are not as our thoughts; nor His ways as our ways. While not many great, not many noble are called, God hath chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom. To show his grace and make his power known, he has often fixed his regards upon the most abandoned, that no flesh might glory in his sight. Jesus came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. And he is able and willing to save to the uttermost, all who come to God by him.

II. We consider the *propriety of accepting this saying*, or, *its claims to truth and general belief*.

It is a faithful saying; it is true. History substantiates the fact that more than eighteen centuries ago a stranger entered our world, asserting that he was the Son of God, the Messiah who was to come. His apostles asserted that he was God manifest in the flesh. Great numbers believed on him—entrusted to him the interests of their souls. The truth of this

saying is identified with the truth of the Bible. It is interwoven in all its parts. The great object of the Bible is to illustrate the character and unfold the mission of the Son of God. All the proofs of the divine origin of the sacred Scriptures go to support this saying.

It is proved by the fulfilment of prophecy. Predictions the most minute and convincing were accomplished—predictions which no human foresight could have suggested—which no human power could have brought about. These prophecies related to different and opposite events; to distant times, to the character, birth-place, life and death of the Saviour; to the fortunes of his visible kingdom. To make a selection out of a great variety, we refer to the fullness of time when Christ was to appear. Many striking predictions were fulfilled by that event. It was foretold by Jacob in his dying moments, that it was to take place before political power departed from Judah. "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet until Shiloh come, and unto him shall the gathering of the people be." The Messiah appeared at that critical period. Roman guards and Roman courts, just then established, proved that the sceptre had departed from Judah and the lawgiver from between his feet. It was predicted by the prophet Haggai that Christ should come during the existence of the second temple: "In this place will I give peace." There appeared the Prince of peace, preaching the gospel of peace. It was foretold, moreover, that his coming should be within "seventy weeks" from the period marked out by Daniel; at whatever time the computation commences, they have long since elapsed. The place where he was to be born, his parentage, the most minute circumstances were pointed out, ages before he appeared. The only correct inference from all this is: "Holy men spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

The truth of this saying is proved by the agreement of the types and antetype. The types were shadows of good things to come: symbolic prophecies. They strengthen the former argument. When we read of the paschal lamb slain in Egypt, each family feeding upon it; of the blood sprinkled upon the door-posts, we see a very significant emblem of Christ our passover, sacrificed for us, whose blood, while it cleanses from all sin, is a defence against the angel of the second death. When we read of the scape-goat on whose head was laid the sins of the people, which he bore into the wilderness, we have no obscure representation of Him who bore our sins in his own body on the tree. Among the types we find the prophet Jonah three days and nights in the whale's belly, which an inspired interpreter has told us prophesied of Christ, who was to be confined an equal length of time in the grave. Such remarkable coincidences evince the influence of a pervading spirit, at once dictating the types and securing their fulfillment.

The truth of this saying is further attested by miracles. Without referring now to the train of miracles by which the mission of Moses was established, (Deut. xxxiv. 10-12,) we confine our attention to the signs and wonders by which Christ and his apostles were approved of God as special messengers of the truth. Christ, in his own name, and by his own undeviated power, and the apostles, by virtue of his Spirit resting upon them, controlled the laws of nature by a word. Their mighty works were not done in a corner. Their number and publicity gave all an opportunity of an examination. Hence an apostle, addressing the Jewish people, said

that Jesus Christ was approved by signs and miracles which were done among them *as they also knew*. A man who could heal the sick by a word, raise the dead, cast out devils, still the raging sea, furnished evidence that God was with him; consequently that his messages were inspired. A cloud of witnesses have also attested the truth of this saying—witnesses in heaven and on earth. Says John—"There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth—the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: these three agree in one. If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son. This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth." That Jesus is the Son of God is fully attested by his baptism, in water, and by his blood, or death, followed by his resurrection, the miraculous power of God confirming this great fundamental article of our faith on both occasions. And the Holy Spirit, whose attestations are absolute truth and veracity, attested his divine mission by his miracles, by his resurrection, by the miraculous powers with which the Apostles were endowed, and even now in the illuminating and sanctifying influences of the Spirit on the hearts of Christians.

Other witnesses have testified to the truth of this saying. Thousands in every age who have been convinced of sin, of their lost condition, have trusted in him for salvation. When ready to perish, he has interposed and saved them. By a life of faith, by resisting temptation, by divine consolation in affliction, by victory over death—they have borne witness that Jesus was mighty to save. It is a true saying, and thousands more will attest its truth.

2. *It is worthy of all acceptance.* A saying may be true, and still be unimportant. But this embodies the most interesting truth: to know and believe which is life eternal. It has as much interest and value at one time as another. In every part of this revolted world this report should be circulated and received. The truth contained in it is adapted to the condition and circumstances of *all* men, for all have sinned and need a Saviour. Such a saying, bearing the seal of Heaven, whose truth and importance have been fully tested by such multitudes in every age, is worthy of *cordial, unqualified, and immediate acceptance.*

It should be *cordially* received. The nature and claims of a report should decide the *manner* of its reception. If it refer to abstract truth, to some distant or unimportant event, it may be believed, but no special interest will be awakened, no emotion will be felt; but when it is announced that the Son of God became flesh, and dwelt among us; that he came to seek and to save that which is lost, were there nothing to blunt the sensibilities and pervert the mind, the most deep and lively interest would be manifested. Were we to hear of peace after a long and ruinous war; or the favorable termination of a cause in which we were deeply concerned, we should receive the tidings with grateful emotion. How then should we receive the tidings of the Gospel, "Glory to God in the highest; on earth peace and good will to men;" "That God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation."

When it was proclaimed amidst the struggles of the Revolution that a peer of France, powerfully allied, possessed of an ample fortune, had landed upon our shores, determined to devote himself and his all to the service of liberty; such a generous act called forth one universal burst of admiration; even grave senators could not repress their tears of joy. How should the intelligence be received, not that an earthly noble, but a heavenly King—God's only Son—had come into our world, not to be honored, but to humble himself; not merely to be exposed to hardship, but to be crucified, to die an ignominious death, prompted solely by love? When it is ascertained beyond a doubt that he accomplished the object of his mission, changed the aspect of the world, opened a door of hope, appeased the wrath of heaven—will not every heart be opened to receive the message?

This saying is worthy of *unqualified acceptance*. Christ Jesus came to *save* sinners: to turn away every one of us from our sins. The terms of salvation are explicit and benevolent. They are of the same character with the message. We must renounce our sins and pleasures, the world, and every evil thing, because they are a fruitful source of sorrow. If self-moved, the Son of God came to our world on such an errand of love, it should be left to him to settle the terms of salvation. How absurd for those who have ruined themselves, who are under sentence of condemnation, to attempt to modify the ground of pardon! In view of the great interests of God's kingdom, of the highest happiness of sinners themselves, in view of all concerned, Jesus Christ has said, that whosoever would be his disciple and share in his mercy, and hope to be saved in heaven, he must *deny himself, and take up his cross—he must forsake all that he hath*. And heaven and earth shall pass away before one tittle of the gospel shall change. Never were terms more suitable. They are simply that we come in our *real* character, as lost sinners—that we honor him as the only Saviour: and then, no matter how numerous or aggravated our sins, they shall be forgiven, and our names be written in the book of life.

It is worthy of *immediate acceptance*. It is addressed to those who are in imminent danger; who are lying under the curse of a broken law; whose hearts are depraved, and are therefore unmeet for the kingdom of heaven. Danger cannot be *too soon* escaped; the evil too soon averted. The message relates to a momentous concern—it deserves *immediate* attention. No matter what our condition in this life—no matter what our age, or how pressing our engagements—we are directed to seek *first* the kingdom of God. While we are in an unconverted state, while under the dominion of selfishness, we cannot please God. The gospel publishes pardon to the guilty, salvation to the lost—why then should we defer acceptance of the terms, when life is so uncertain, and an evil heart of unbelief is so dangerous? God is sincere in sending this message to us. He says, "To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." Every thing depends upon our acceptance of it. "He that believeth not, shall be damned." "What shall it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his own soul." Prudence, reason, self-interest, the word and Spirit of God, the triumphant and the despairing death-beds of sinners, all dictate and urge to an *immediate* acceptance of the gospel. Lay hold on eternal life.

I address multitudes to-day who have heard this saying ten thousand times, but it has been as an idle tale. Is it a *true* saying that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners? and how can you reject it? Gratitude should prompt to an acceptance. When guilt, like a heavy cloud, hung over our world, ready to burst upon us—when the wrath of God was kindled against us—when earth, smitten with the curse, gave signs that all was lost—then the Lord Jesus Christ came into our world, took upon him our nature, obeyed the divine law, endured its penalty, yielded up his life on the cross, that we might live. Are your hearts steeled against *such* love? “God commendeth his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ did for us.” O listen to his kind invitation this day, though you might justly be left to perish, and *might* expect the minister of death to vindicate slighted mercy and abused goodness, still the voice of love is addressed to you, “*turn ye, why will ye die.*” How long will ye refuse to yield your hearts to Christ? Recollect under what circumstances I stand before you, as an ambassador of Christ. I place before you life and death; if you reject this message, it is at your peril. God is concerned for the honor of his Son. Such grace as that offered in the gospel, necessarily involves the deepest responsibility. How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation? Think of the guilt you contract by rejecting this gospel. You reject the *truth* of God; for it is a faithful saying; every line of it is true, and sealed with God’s seal; you are reflecting upon the wisdom and goodness of God, for it is worthy of all acceptance; your every interest, for this world and the next, for time and eternity, is involved in it; in refusing to believe, you sin against your own soul. The objects for which you are about to barter your immortal interests, are vanishing away. Soon you will be left, devoid of comfort; youth and beauty fled; pleasures and honors gone; friends and companions removed; the world a blank; the soul unsaved; defiled with sin; stung with remorse; before you, an undone eternity—above you, an offended God—behind you, a misspent life. O the guilt and folly of unbelief! Is there no way to arouse you to reflection? Has a sleep—the prelude of eternal death—fallen upon you? O that you were wise—that you would accept the offer of life. Two worlds concentrate their interests here. Now is the accepted time.